

ST JOHN CHRYSOSTOM:
A LETTER FROM EXILE

TO POPE INNOCENT I ¹

[From Cucusus, 406]

To Innocent, Bishop of Rome, John sends greeting in the Lord.

MY body is pent in a single place, but the wings of love circle the world; and I, whom so many miles part from you, am near Your Piety none the less and enjoy your presence daily. With the eyes love lends me I contemplate your courage of soul, your sincere affection, your dauntless resolve, the deep and abiding consolation you give me continually. The waves run high, there are reefs and rocks and crags in plenty, yet all this serves only to quicken your vigilance. Neither distance nor lapse of time not stress of events has been able to upset you; you keep your post like a trusty steersman, most alert at his watch when the waves surge highest before his eyes, when the sea is roughest, the noise of waters deepest, when darkness is thick at noon.

I am profoundly thankful, and wish I could send you far more letters—for my own sake not least. That is denied me by the desolateness of my retreat; not only travellers from outside but dwellers in this region itself find it difficult to reach me; my place of confinement is as remote as can be, and the fear of robbers lies like a barrier across men's path. I would ask you therefore to pity me for my long silence rather than see in it any blameworthy remissness. That my failure to write meant no disrespect I may now prove. After long waiting, I have come by two messengers at last—Paul the deacon and John the priest, a revered friend; by them I send you my never-failing thanks for your more than fatherly care and fondness and solicitude over me. Had it lain with Your Piety alone, things by now would all have been put to rights, the mass of troubles and scandals been removed, the Churches restored to peace and tranquillity; all would be well; our insulted laws, our offended ancestral ordinances would have been vindicated. As it is, things are far otherwise, and the old

: Migne 52, cols. 535-6; D'Alton, pp. 303-5.

transgressors are surpassing their earlier outrages. I forbear to recount their latest doings at length—it would run beyond the bounds of a history, let alone a letter. Only I make this one appeal to your vigilance: though the authors of this widespread turmoil may be beyond repentance and cure, let hopelessness and despair never master you who have set your heart on healing these troubles; consider how much your success will mean. The task you face concerns the whole world almost—the Christian communities beaten to their knees, the scattered laity, the persecuted clergy, the exiled bishops, the flouted traditions of our fathers.

Urgently then, most urgently, I bid you intensify your zeal with the intenser persecution. Something may then be gained, recovery may come nearer—such are my hopes. But should they be unfulfilled, then you for your part have your crown prepared by a gracious God, and for all the sufferers your perseverance in love will be a great consolation. For two years I myself have been in exile, exposed to hunger and pestilence, to constant fighting and sieges, inexpressible loneliness, daily peril of death, the swords of the Isaurians; yet I have been immeasurably consoled and inspired by your continued unwavering courage and confidence and the joy of your true and abundant love. This has been my bulwark and safeguard, my haven of peace, my storehouse of numberless good things, my source of joy and of untold happiness. And should I be carried away again into some more desolate region still, that stalwart comfort in my distress will be with me when I go.

Translated by WALTER SHEWRING

NOTICE

The present issue of BLACKFRIARS is a double number (July-August). The next issue will appear in September and will include 'Films: A Personal View' by Freda Bruce-Lockhart, 'Language and Metaphysics' by Columba Ryan, O.P., and 'The Sculpture of Arthur Pollen', an illustrated article by Iris Conlay.